Immigration status of benefit claimants published for first time

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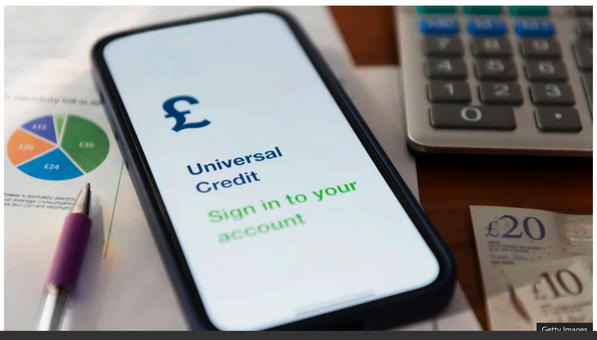

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(UC) - a benefit designed to help both employed and unemployed people with living costs - has been published for the first time.

In June, nearly eight million people received universal credit, 83.6% of whom were British and Irish nationals.

More than a million claimants were born overseas, including around 700,000 EU citizens who arrived in the UK before Brexit and have the right to live and work in the UK.

Around 1.5% of claimants were refugees and 0.7% had arrived in the UK via safe routes such as those for Ukrainians and Afghans.

More than 75,000 claimants who are in the UK temporarily and would typically not be able to receive benefits are also claiming UC.

The Department for Work and Pensions has said most foreign nationals can claim only after five years residency, but there are exceptions such as for victims of modern slavery.

The government produced figures going back to April 2022. In that time, the proportion of claimants who were born overseas has remained broadly level at between 15% and 17%.

During the same period, the total number of people on UC rose from 5.5m to 7.9m.

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According to the most recent figures for May 2025, around half of EU citizens claiming UC are in employment, compared to a fifth of refugees.

The figures were published following pressure from some Conservatives and the independent MP Rupert Lowe.

A Downing Street spokesperson said the prime minister wanted to see the number of unemployed foreign nationals claiming benefits to go down and insisted the government was "toughening up the system" by doubling the time a migrant has to wait before qualifying for permanent - or settled - status in the UK.

They added that people in the UK illegally are not allowed to access UC.

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Shadow home secretary Chris Philp said the "staggering figures" were "clear proof that the Labour government has lost control of our welfare system".

"Under Kemi Badenoch, we've set out a clear, common-sense position. This is about fairness, responsibility and protecting support for those who've contributed to this country," he said.

The Conservatives have said foreign nationals should not get the personal independence payment (Pip) disability benefit or the health element of UC.

Lowe said the publication of the data was a "huge win" for those who had "relentlessly pushed for this".

He described the levels of foreign nationals claiming UC as "absolute insanity" adding: "We cannot afford it. The country is BROKE."

The government had hoped to slow the rise of the benefits bill, but had to backtrack on many of its plans following a rebellion among its own MPs.

Under the remaining measures, the health related element of universal credit will be reduced for new claims from April 2026.

Universal Credit

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